

39. Reduced Urban Corridors

Proposal

Elimination of an Urban Corridor along Capitol Boulevard, substantial reduction in size of Urban Corridors along Harrison Avenue east of Division Street and along Fourth and State Avenues east of downtown, along with merger of two classes of corridor in these areas, remaining Urban Corridor area along these streets would be about one lot (instead of one-quarter mile) deep. These:

Areas nearest downtown along Harrison Avenue east of Division Street and the upper portions of the State Street/Fourth Avenue corridor to the intersection of Martin Way and Pacific Avenue should blend travel modes with priority for pedestrian, bicycle and transit systems. These areas should provide for a mix of low-intensity professional offices, commercial uses and multi-family buildings forming a continuous and pedestrian-oriented edge along the arterial streets. There shall be a three-story height limit if any portion of the building is within 100' from a single-family residential zone, provided that the City may establish an additional height bonus for residential development.

Background

Urban Corridors are a combined land use and transportation system approach to development included in the Thurston Regional Transportation Plan and first added to Olympia's Comprehensive Plan in 1994. Generally the corridors were to be areas within one-quarter mile (walking distance) of major bus-served arterial streets. They are to become areas mixing commercial development with housing. The most intensive uses were anticipated within 400 feet of the major streets, with a gradual transition to adjacent residential neighborhoods.

In contrast with the primary urban corridor areas, portions of the Urban Corridor in older neighborhoods, such as along Capitol Boulevard, Harrison Avenue east of Division, and along Fourth and State Avenues east of downtown, are targeted for less intensive mixed use development generally not exceeding three stories and about seven housing units per acre. The version adopted by Olympia in the City's Comprehensive Plan in 1994 provided that, "Where existing lower density residential abut the main road, average may be 7 units per acre or more." The areas described in this proposal generally fall within this category.

Options

Option 1. Adopt proposed inner corridor description and Future Land Use map with Urban Corridor in these areas approximating areas currently zoned for commercial and multi-family uses.

Option 2. Adopt 'standard' width Urban Corridor in these areas, i.e., one-quarter mile from major street along with residential density limitations in current Plan.

Option 3. Do not merge two categories of corridor in these areas. (Current Plan provides that upper portion of these areas is to have greater range of land uses.)

Option 4. Continue to designate area east of Capitol Boulevard (south of I-5) as an Urban Corridor.

Analysis

The concept of transit-oriented corridors with sufficient intensity of land uses to support that transit service is a key component of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan. However, how to implement this concept where the corridors pass thru well-established neighborhoods has been a continuing issue for the community.

The Plan adopted in 1994, along with the implementing zoning, addressed this challenge by generally only designating those properties adjacent to the corridor streets for commercial and multi-family uses, and by designating the remainder of the half-mile wide corridor for somewhat higher residential densities – ranging from 5 to 12 units per acre with some limited to 8 units per acre – rather than the 15 units per acre minimum target of the outer portion of the corridor. In addition, the Plan emphasized the importance of a gradual transition from the existing neighborhoods to the new more intense uses along the major street.

Olympia implemented this Plan by applying five different zoning districts in to these portions of the Urban Corridor. For example, in the Capitol Boulevard area only the existing Wildwood Center was designated for commercial use and it was limited to 'Neighborhood Retail.'

The proposal would remove the Urban Corridor designation from the Wildwood area along Capitol Boulevard but would retain a Neighborhood Center designation. This area borders the City of Tumwater, which has a similar Urban Corridor designation along this street. Given that this area of Olympia is nearly fully developed, this change is unlikely to have any significant impact. Rather, it may lead to increased property values by removing the perceived threat of more intense development – at least on the Olympia side of the city limits.

The proposal to narrow the Urban Corridor designation in the other 'older' neighborhoods is likely to reduce the prospect of future expansion of the more intense development beyond those lots bordering the corridor street. Accordingly, it is likely to limit expansion of employment in these areas and may result in not achieving the 25 employees per acre target envisioned in the original plan. This in turn may minimize the growth of mid-day transit use in these areas between downtown and the outer portion of the Urban Corridors. However, the overall effect on the transit system is difficult to predict and likely would depend upon how intensely the remaining portion of the Urban Corridor is developed.

The areas to be removed from the Urban Corridor designation are proposed to be placed in a 'low density neighborhood' category allowing up to 12 dwelling units per acre. Thus no substantial change in the residential development in these areas is to be expected if this proposal is adopted.

Merger of the two urban categories of these areas – which differed only with regard to the intensity of use – may lead to some additional prospect for development near downtown. In particular, it is likely to lead to merging the City’s High Density Corridor ‘1’ and ‘2’ zones as the Plan would no longer provide a foundation for drawing a distinction between these two categories of land use zoning.

Original Staff Proposal

Options 2 & 3. Generally consistent with current Comprehensive Plan.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Option 1. Reduce width of Urban Corridor in older neighborhoods, merge two Urban Corridor categories in remainder, and remove Capitol Boulevard area from Urban Corridor designation.

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40. Low-Density Neighborhoods

Proposal

New Policy, PL14.3, “Preserve and enhance the character of existing established Low-density Neighborhoods. Disallow medium- or high-density development in existing Low-density Neighborhood areas except for Neighborhood Centers.” And, increase potential residential density in these areas and describe as:

This designation provides for low-density residential development, primarily single-family detached housing and low rise multi-family housing, in densities ranging from twelve units per acre to one unit per five acres depending on environmental sensitivity of the area. Where environmental constraints are significant, to achieve minimum densities extraordinary clustering may be allowed when combined with environmental protection. Barring environmental constraints, densities of at least four units per acre should be achieved. Supportive land uses and other types of housing, including accessory dwelling units, townhomes and small apartment buildings, may be permitted. Specific zoning and densities are to be based on the unique characteristics of each area with special attention to stormwater drainage and aquatic habitat. Medium-Density Neighborhoods Centers are allowed within Low-Density Neighborhoods. Clustered development to provide future urbanization opportunities will be required where urban utilities are not readily available. [Emphasis added.]

Background

Olympia has a long-standing practice of seeking to ensure that new development is compatible with existing residential uses. Land Use Goal 8 of the current Comprehensive Plan is, “To ensure that new development maintains or improves neighborhood character and livability.” This goal is rephrased in the proposed Plan update as, “GL20. Development maintains and improves neighborhood character and livability.” Among the policies related to Goal 20 is, “Require development in established neighborhoods to be of a type, scale, orientation, and design that maintains or improves the character, aesthetic quality, and livability of the neighborhood.”

These Plan goals and policies have been implemented through zoning, neighborhood programs, architectural design requirements, and other means. For example, about 1500 acres are now in R6-12 zoning, a transitional zoning district that allows both detached single-family homes and small shared-wall housing such as duplexes and townhomes. In addition, neighborhood retail uses are allowed at designated sites in both the current and proposed Plan update.

Options

Option 1. Adopt Policy and Low-Density Neighborhood description as proposed; including associated rezone criteria.

Option 2. Do not adopt new policy; retain existing eight units per acre maximum density for these areas and place areas now designated for 6 to 12 units per acre (R6-12) in ‘medium-density’ instead of ‘low-density’ category.

Option 3. No action: do not adopt, but retain other ‘neighborhood protection’ provisions of Plan.

Analysis

The Future Land Use map of the plan identifies most of the City and urban growth areas for “Low-Density Neighborhoods.” Other portions of the plan refer to ‘maintaining and improving’ such neighborhoods. At minimum this added policy might shift the emphasis in the Plan from ensuring that development ‘maintains and improves’ the character of low-density neighborhoods toward a policy of ‘preservation.’ In general this phrasing may be interpreted as more limiting of future development. In particular, a policy of preserving the character of these areas could be inconsistent with goals and policies of the Plan that envision changes in some currently somewhat rural areas. However, it is associated with a proposal to increase the potential residential density in these areas which would suggest a ‘balancing approach’ when new development is proposed.

To help guide any proposal to increase zoning densities in these areas, a set of ‘rezone criteria’ is proposed, including:

- Proposed rezones will clearly implement applicable policies in all elements of the Comprehensive Plan. If there are clear inconsistencies between the proposed rezone and specific, applicable policies in the Comprehensive Plan, the rezone should not be approved.
- The proposed zoning shall be identical to an existing zoning district that is adjacent to the subject property. The proposed zoning may also be approved if it clearly fulfills the specific purpose statement of an adjacent zoning district that is not identical.
- Clear evidence that the maximum density of development permitted in the proposed zoning district can be adequately served by infrastructure systems as described in the City’s adopted master plans for sanitary sewer, potable water, transportation, parks and recreation, stormwater and public safety services; and in the applicable facilities and services plans of the Olympia School District, Intercity Transit, and other required public service providers.

These would generally limit most multi-family housing in this designation to locations adjacent to previously approved higher-density zoning, such as the R6-12 zones. Such changes might result in a few hundred more homes being constructed in parts of the City – such as undeveloped portions of the northwest or southeast – than previously anticipated. These changes are within a scale that would probably not require significant changes in the municipal infrastructure planned to support development. However, it might result in individual developments being required to build more improvements than anticipated; such as an additional turn lane or an additional water main connection.

In general, this proposal is likely to lead to some gradual increase in the number of housing units in areas now composed primarily of single-family homes. But whether this combination of land uses and policies will lead to a reduction in environmental impacts of growth in these areas along with an increase in density and associated impacts such as traffic and stormwater runoff is difficult to predict.

Original Staff Proposal

Option 2.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Option 1.